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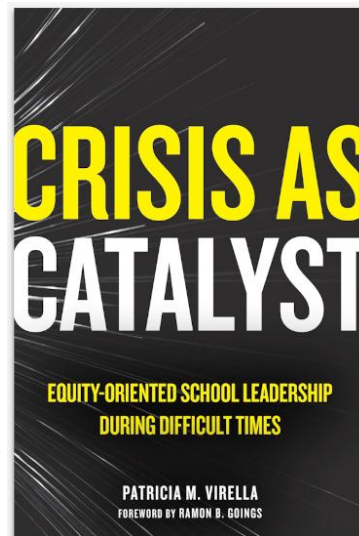
Virella, P. M. (2025). *Crisis as catalyst: Equity-oriented school leadership during difficult times*. Harvard Education Press.

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Patricia Virella's *Crisis as a Catalyst* appears at a critical juncture in educational leadership scholarship, as the field increasingly acknowledges that growth and healing from crises are essential competencies for school leaders. The text's central purpose is to reframe crises as opportunities for systemic transformation. Through qualitative research involving fifty public school principals across the United States including Puerto Rico, Virella examines how school leaders navigate and respond to a wide spectrum of crises, such as student health emergencies, school violence, racial harm, natural disasters, and the COVID-19 pandemic.



The book presents a comprehensive framework for equity-oriented crisis leadership, structured around key pillars that guide leaders toward practical and ethical decision-making. Virella argues that hope functions as the foundation upon which equitable systems can be built. Her framework urges leaders to cultivate an equity mindset, engage in critical self-reflection, include multiple stakeholders in the decision-making process, design equitable systems, strategically allocate resources, and advocate for transformative change. By referencing public exemplars of hope-driven leadership, such as Barack Obama's presidential campaign, Virella contextualizes the theoretical foundation of her work within broader sociopolitical narratives.

Structurally, each chapter is organized around a thematic element of the framework. Chapters begin by highlighting the importance of one of the framework's pillars often connecting the content to a thought provoking narrative, followed by a clear outline of the elements within that theme. Virella concludes each chapter with reflective discussion prompts and a case study offering readers practical insight into the complexities of educational

crises." This applied structure enhances the book's relevance for professional learning communities and leadership development programs.

Drawing on her extensive background in educational leadership and equity studies, Virella bridges theory and practice throughout the text. Appendix B, in particular, provides district-level leaders with evidence-based tools and protocols for crisis preparation and response. These materials could serve as catalysts for collaborative reflection and policy development across schools and districts. Given Virella's professional experience in urban education, this text may be particularly relevant for novice principals working in diverse urban middle and high schools.

A notable contribution of Virella's work lies in its synthesis of equity, resilience, and distributed leadership theories. Her message complements Venet's (2021) assertion that the aim of equity-centered trauma-informed practice is to cultivate resilient systems rather than merely resilient individuals (p. 40). Likewise, Jennings (2021) emphasizes empowerment through shared leadership, principles echoed by Virella's call for inclusive, community-based decision making.

In the book's concluding chapters, Virella advances an impassioned argument for radical systemic change, encouraging leaders to "grasp things at the root" by addressing longstanding inequities through sustained, equity-driven reform. This perspective aligns with Minor's (2023) concept of collective reflection as a foundation for educational transformation (p. 31). Unlike many texts that primarily focus on teachers' roles in equity and trauma-informed work, Virella positions school leaders as central agents of institutional change capable of shaping resilient, equitable educational infrastructures.

Methodologically, Virella's qualitative study benefits from the diversity of its sample, encompassing a range of racial, ethnic, geographic, and professional backgrounds. The inclusion of eight first-year principals introduces fresh perspectives on emergent leadership, though it also highlights some limitations related to depth of experience. Future research could build on these findings by conducting comparative analyses between novice and veteran principals to deepen understanding of crisis leadership across career stages.

Ultimately, the text's most profound contribution lies in its assertion that hope is an essential driver of educational equity and change. Virella's framework posits that crises not only expose systemic inadequacies but also create a natural "pause" for reflection and transformation. Her work challenges educational leaders to embrace this pause as an invitation to act with moral clarity, strategic vision, and unwavering commitment to equity.

References

- Jennings, P. A. (2021). *Teacher burnout turnaround: Strategies for empowered educators*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- Minor, K. (2023). *Teaching fiercely: Spreading joy and justice in our schools*. Jossey-Bass.
- Venet, A.S. (2023). *Equity-centered trauma-informed education*. Routledge.

About the Reviewer

Kayla Leake is an instructional assistant professor and student teaching supervisor at Illinois State University. Kayla received her B.S. in elementary education and M.S.Ed. in teaching and learning from Illinois State University. In addition, Kayla is a doctoral student pursuing her Ed.D. in teaching and learning. She has a passion for supporting elementary and middle level pre-service teachers in the college of education. Her current research focuses on the wellbeing of preservice teachers through resilience skills, mindfulness, and supportive environments. Her years as a public educator of elementary and middle school learners also helped cultivate an interest in trauma-informed education.



About the Book Author

Patricia M. Virella is an assistant professor of urban educational leadership at Montclair State University. Additionally, she is the founder of My Academic Writing Routine, an organization committed to demystifying academic writing for grad students, focusing on graduate students of color. Dr. Virella received her B.S. in business administration from Adelphi University and her M.S. Ed. in early and childhood education from Sarah Lawrence College. She has received an M.S. Ed. in urban education leadership from Bank Street. Dr. Virella completed her doctoral studies in learning, leadership, and policy from the University of Connecticut.



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